



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



VALENTINES DAY AT THE STATE VETERAN'S HOME

Residents at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home had a wonderful time at the Valentine's Day Dance/Party.

Special thanks to Miss South Dakota, Miranda Mack and our friends from Ellsworth Air Force for visiting and dancing with our veterans and for the Valentines Day cards provided to our heroes.



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CLAY COUNTY VETERANS ADDRESS USD CLASS

Jing Williams, professor of Social Studies Education at the University of South Dakota, invited veterans to speak to her class about military experiences. It is her goal for these students can hear first-hand about the experience our veterans and their families face while they are deployed, as well as their transitioning back into civilian life.

In addition, the students participate in a program called "Clay County's Fallen". The students pick a veteran from Clay County to research and deliver a presentation on their hero.

Cynthia Aden, Clay County Veterans Service Officer, was one of the veterans that addressed the group and works with the students on their research project.



SYMPATHIES

SDDVA has received word that funeral and first night wake service arrangements are finalized for Denver American Horse. Denver served as the Oglala Lakota County Veterans Service Officer in Pine Ridge. He died Sunday, February 11.

First Night Wake Service will be held Monday, February 19, at 10:00 am at the Wakpamni CAP Office in Pine Ridge.

Funeral Service will be held on Tuesday, February 20, at 10:00 am at the Wakpamni CAP Office in Pine Ridge. With Interment at 2:30 pm on Tuesday, February 20, at the Black Hills National Cemetery.

Funeral arrangements, condolences and tributes can be found at: <http://siouxfuneralhome.com/book-of-memories/3426998/American-Horse-Denver/service-details.php>

Denver did an excellent job of assisting his veterans. Rest in Peace Denver, the best is yet to come!



ABSENTEE VOTING

The Electronic Voter Registration (ELVR) and Absentee Ballot Application System for Uniformed and Overseas Citizens is now live and can be accessed at the following link: <https://elvr.sdsos.gov/>

The site can also be accessed through the Secretary of State's website on the Military Members page in the Election Section: <https://sdsos.gov/elections-voting/voting/military-members.aspx>

The UOCAVA ELVRS allows all voters covered under UOCAVA that possess an active South Dakota driver license to register to vote and submit an application for an absentee ballot electronically through this system. This system will save time for these individuals to submit a voter registration form and/or submit an absentee ballot application request to their county auditor. Individuals can also choose to receive their ballot electronically when they fill out the absentee ballot application portion of this system (only primary and general election ballots can be sent to the voter electronically). The application for an absentee ballot is good for the calendar year in which it is signed.

Please note that the deadline for voter registration for the **2018 Primary election is May 21, 2018** and the **2018 General election is October 22, 2018**. Individuals can request an absentee ballot up until 5 PM local time the day prior to the election, however one must consider the time that it will take their ballot to get back to their county auditor by mail, as it must be in the auditor's office by election day.

Lastly, a reminder that individuals may track their absentee ballot status using our Voter Information Portal <https://sos.sd.gov/Elections/VIPLogin.aspx> including:

- a. when the absentee ballot application is received by the auditor's office
- b. when the absentee ballot is sent to the voter, and
- c. when the voted absentee ballot was received by the county auditor

HAMLIN COUNTY RECOGNIZES VETERANS

David Schaefer, Hamlin County VSO, had the honor this week to present two veterans with their World War II medals and one veteran with his Korean Ambassador Peace Medal.

Schaefer thanked these heroes for their service to this great country and expressed his gratitude and respect to them.

Pictured left to right are U.S. Army Veteran Elwood Andrews and U.S. Army Veterans Delbert Petersen and Gerald Dede.



BIANAS JOINS SDDVA TEAM

Rebekah Bianas is the newest member of the SDDVA Claims Office team. She will serve as one of our claims examiners and fills the vacancy created when Michelle Henderson was promoted to state veterans service officer.

Prior to joining SDDVA, Rebekah worked with the S.D. Department of Labor and assisted veterans in their quest for employment.

She started her duties with SDDVA on Monday and looks forward to working with our team, our partners, and our heroes.

Welcome to the team, Rebekah!



SYMPATHIES

We are sad to report that one of the South Dakota National Guard's retired Soldiers, Stephen Andrew Gomez, age 89, passed away February 13, 2018.

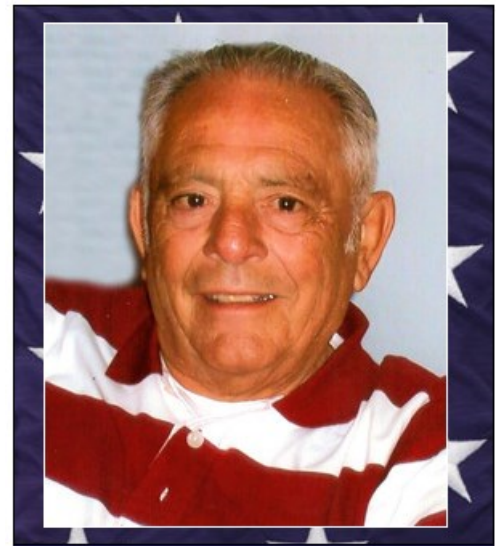
Steve had a long tour of duty with the South Dakota National Guard. After prior service, he enlisted in Battery D, 128th Anti-Aircraft Battalion in Deadwood, SD on September 22, 1953 in grade of E-4. He later transferred to Headquarters Battery, 147th Field Artillery Group on September 22, 1956 in the grade of Sergeant. On November 4, 1956 he accepted his commission as 2nd Lieutenant. He remained in the 147th Group with various positions including Communications Officer and Motor Officer. He was promoted to Captain on October 25, 1965.

Gomez transferred to Headquarters, 3rd Howitzer Battalion in February 1966, where he remained until a major reorganization eliminated the unit in 1968.

Captain Gomez then was assigned as Selective Service Officer at HQ, SDARNG at Rapid City. He climbed the ladder to Section Chief, Selective Service and attained the rank of Colonel on December 4, 1985. Steve retired from the South Dakota National Guard on November 15, 1988.

During his career he had a passion for the South Dakota National Guard museum. A passion that continued into his retirement. In his hands the museum expanded and excelled.

Obituary and funeral details can be found at: http://www.feigumfh.com/memsol.cgi?user_id=2072463.



ROUNDS, COLLEAGUES URGE VA TO HONOR VETERANS' EMERGENCY CARE CLAIMS

U.S. Sens. Mike Rounds (R-S.D.), a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, along with 11 of his Senate colleagues, sent a letter to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary David Shulkin to request that the VA reimburse veterans who were billed for emergency treatment at private hospitals.

In January, the VA announced that it would not retroactively reimburse veterans for their emergency treatment despite a court decision that ruled the VA is responsible for emergency medical costs at private, non-VA hospitals. In response, the Senators wrote to VA Secretary David Shulkin urging him to reimburse veterans who filed a claim for emergency medical costs before the court ruling.

"Between 2010 and April 16, 2016, the VA erroneously denied thousands of veterans' claims for emergency treatment," the senators wrote. "With the VA's recent interpretation of this ruling, veterans who filed claims before April 16, 2016, would see no relief from the VA's wrongful application of the law and would be stuck paying medical bills that Congress intended that the VA pay. We ask that the VA include those veterans whose claims were decided before April 16, 2016, so that all veterans can fully take advantage of a benefit Congress intended they receive."

The *Expansion of Veteran Eligibility for Reimbursement Act*, enacted in 2010, directed the VA to pay for veterans' emergency treatment at non-VA facilities unless the veteran has another form of insurance that entirely covers their medical costs. Since 2010, the VA has denied thousands of claims because a veteran's other insurance partially paid for their treatment, leaving veterans to cover the difference for costly emergency care.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims ruled on April 16, 2016, that the VA's interpretation of its responsibility for non-VA emergency treatment was wrong and ordered the VA to begin paying these claims. Despite that, the VA has chosen not to pay veterans who filed before the 2016 court ruling.

The VA released its new policy regarding payment or reimbursement for emergency treatment at private hospitals on January 9, 2018. The VA will only pay for new claims or those not decided prior to April 16, 2016.

Sens. Thom Tillis (R-N.C.), Steve Daines (R-Mont.), Jon Tester (D-Mont.), Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.), Patty Murray (D-Wash.), Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio), Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), Mazie Hirono (D-Hawaii), Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.), Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.) and Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) also signed the letter to Secretary Shulkin. The senators' letter to Secretary Shulkin can be read online [HERE](#).



UPCOMING EVENTS

2018

Feb 16-18—American Legion Mid Winter Conference—Oacoma
Feb 19—State Offices Closed for President's Day
Feb 23-25—Vietnam Veterans & Era Reunion—Ramada Inn—Mitchell
Mar 4-8—National VFW Conference—Washington, DC
Mar 6—SFVAHCS Town Hall—Sioux Falls VA Auditorium—5:00 pm (CT)
Mar 9—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—VFW Post 1273—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)
Mar 13—VABHHCS Veteran Town Hall and Outreach—Newcastle Senior Center—8:00 am (MT)
Mar 13—VABHHCS Veteran Town Hall and Outreach—Sundance Senior Center—1:00 pm (MT)
Mar 22—Veterans Legal Services—Watertown National Guard Armory—9:00 am—3:00 pm (CT)
Mar 23—Veterans Legal Services—Sioux Falls DAV—9:00 am—3:00 pm (CT)
Apr 18—Veterans Council Meeting—PVA Headquarters—Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)
Apr 27-29—DAV State Convention—The Lodge—Deadwood
Jun 7-10—American Legion State Convention—Spearfish
Jun 14-17—VFW State Convention—Sioux Falls
Jul 14-17—DAV National Convention—Reno, NV
Jul 21-25—VFW National Convention—Kansas City, MO
Jul 26—VABHHCS Veterans Town Hall—Post 8 American Legion—Pierre
Aug 20-24—SDDVA Benefits School—Ramkota—Pierre
Aug 24-30—American Legion National Convention—Minneapolis, MN
Oct 10—SD Veterans Commission Meeting—Soldiers and Sailors Building—Pierre—8:00 am (CT)



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